



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council
Through: Ben Williamson, City Manager
From: Jawaria Tareen, Deputy City Manager
Date: October 12, 2025
Subject: **Guidelines for Council and Mayoral Media Engagement**

FUTURE AGENDA REQUEST:

Discuss the City Council & Mayor's interaction with the media.

BACKGROUND:

This memorandum provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Mayor and City Council in communicating with the press and the public, consistent with the City's Media Relations Policy (Revised 2024) and applicable state law. It reinforces the Council's leadership role in public communication while ensuring coordination with the City for accuracy, transparency, and legal compliance.

Farmers Branch operates under a Council-Manager form of government in which the City Council serves as the legislative and policy-making authority, and the City Manager administers policies and oversees daily operations. Within this structure, the City Council and Mayor play a central role in articulating the City's vision, priorities, and adopted policies to the community.

The City's Media Relations Policy supports leadership by providing a framework for coordinating City communications to ensure that information released to the public is factual, timely, and consistent with official City positions.

The City Council and Mayor are encouraged to communicate with the media on policy matters, legislative decisions, and community initiatives. Council Members and the Mayor may express their perspectives on issues under discussion or on actions taken by the Council, provided that such comments respect confidentiality and do not involve personnel, litigation, or procurement matters that are protected by administrative or legal privilege. Statements should be factual, professional, and reflective of the City's adopted direction. The Communications Department serves as a resource to provide factual verification and background material when needed, ensuring that public messaging aligns with the City's records and data.

When responding to press inquiries, Council Members should distinguish between their personal views and the Council's official positions. A simple disclaimer, such

as *“These remarks represent my perspective as a member of the City Council and do not necessarily reflect the position of the full Council,”* may be used when appropriate. Once the Council takes formal action on a matter, Members are encouraged to accurately reflect the adopted decision, even if they expressed differing opinions during deliberation. This reinforces the integrity of the governing body and ensures the public receives a clear understanding of the City's direction.

The Texas Open Meetings Act prohibits Council Members from deliberating City business outside posted meetings. Accordingly, public or media comments should avoid suggesting consensus among a quorum unless that consensus has been reached through official action. Similarly, under the Texas Public Information Act, all written or recorded communications involving City business, including media statements or emails, are subject to public disclosure. Council Members must avoid releasing confidential information or commenting on matters pending before the City that are protected by law.

The City's Media Relations Policy identifies the City Manager and Public Information Officer (PIO) as the official spokespersons for operational and administrative matters. However, this policy does not limit the Mayor or Council Members from speaking on matters of policy or governance. Coordination with the City Manager is encouraged, not for approval, but for accuracy and consistency. This collaborative approach allows the Council and staff to speak with one voice, strengthening public trust and confidence in City leadership.

Many Texas cities follow similar models that balance elected leadership with coordinated communication. Cities such as Richardson, Carrollton, Plano, and Austin encourage Council Members to engage with the media on governance issues while ensuring factual support from communications staff. These models reinforce that elected officials are the public face of policy decisions, while professional staff provide operational expertise and factual verification.

To support these principles, the following actions are recommended:

1. Affirm that the Mayor and City Council are the primary representatives of City policy decisions and legislative priorities.
2. Develop a concise Council Communications Protocol to outline how elected officials may coordinate with the Communications Office for factual verification.
3. Provide periodic media and public affairs training to strengthen message discipline, legal awareness, and communication skills.
4. Maintain a collaborative relationship between Council, the City Manager, and Communications Director to ensure accuracy and consistency in public messaging.

This approach ensures that the City of Farmers Branch maintains a unified, transparent, and professional presence in all media interactions, reflecting both the

Council's leadership and the community's expectations of integrity and accountability.

DRAFT

Council Communications Protocol

***Applies To: Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Communications Team, and
Department Directors***

Purpose

In alignment with the guidelines, this document presents the Council and mayoral media engagement guidelines. This protocol supports a unified voice for the City while respecting both the City Council's policymaking role and the City Manager's administrative responsibilities.

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure accuracy, consistency, and transparency in all communications made on behalf of the City of Farmers Branch. It reinforces the Council–Manager form of government established by the City Charter and provides clear guidance for coordination among elected officials, the City Manager, and staff when engaging with media, residents, and community partners.

Guiding Principles

1. *Clarity of Roles* – The Mayor and City Council represent the City's legislative and policy direction. The City Manager and staff implement those policies and manage daily operations.
2. *Transparency and Integrity* – All communications should be factual, timely, and reflective of adopted City policy.
3. *Respect for Governance Structure* – Staff report to the City Manager, not to individual Council Members, in accordance with the City Charter.
4. *Consistency in Messaging* – Public statements should align with approved City policy, official actions, and the City's strategic goals.

Roles and Responsibilities

A. Mayor and City Council

- Serve as the official representatives of the City's policies, legislative priorities, and adopted positions.
- Direct requests for factual or operational information through the City Manager's Office.
- Coordinate with the City Manager for media inquiries or public statements involving official City business.
- Avoid making statements that may conflict with adopted City policies or staff's administrative roles.

B. City Manager

- Acts as the primary spokesperson for City operations and administration.
- Ensures consistency in public messaging across departments.
- Provides factual and policy background information to assist the Mayor and Council in preparing for public statements or interviews.
- Approves or delegates media responses related to operational matters.

C. Communications – Public Information Officer (PIO)

- Oversees preparation, review, and dissemination of official City information.
- Coordinates with the City Manager to verify accuracy before release of statements, press releases, or social media responses.
- Supports Councilmembers and the Mayor with factual information, talking points, or clarifications routed through the City Manager's Office.
- Maintains alignment between all communication channels and City branding standards.

D. Department Directors

- Provide subject-matter expertise to the City Manager or Communications Office for official responses.
- Do not issue public statements on policy matters without prior authorization from the City Manager.

Communication Procedures

A. Media Inquiries

- All media inquiries related to City operations should be referred to the City Manager.
- If a Councilmember receives a media request, they may provide comments that reflect City policy, but they need to notify the City Manager's Office before or immediately after the interview.
- For sensitive or emerging issues, the City Manager will coordinate approved talking points with the Communications team.

B. Public Statements and Social Media

- Elected officials are encouraged to promote City events and initiatives, but should refrain from commenting on operational or personnel matters.
- The City's official social media accounts are managed exclusively by the Communications Office.

- Any City-branded communication by an elected official (e.g., newsletters, videos) should be reviewed for factual accuracy by the Communications team.

C. Crisis and Emergency Communication

- During emergencies, all external communication will flow through the City's Emergency Management and Communications teams under the direction of the City Management.
- Councilmembers should refer media inquiries to official channels and avoid issuing independent statements until coordinated messaging is released.

D. Information Requests

- Council information requests should be directed through the City Manager's Office.
- Requests requiring extensive research or data will be prioritized according to operational capacity and legal obligations under the Public Information Act.

Training and Support

The City will provide periodic media and public affairs training to the Mayor, Council, and senior staff. Training will include best practices for interviews, message discipline, legal considerations, and social media conduct.

Accountability and Continuous Improvement

The City Manager's Office will review the effectiveness of this protocol annually and recommend updates as needed. The Communications team will document recurring issues or lessons learned from major communications and incorporate them into future training.

Conclusion

This protocol affirms the City's commitment to transparent, responsible, and unified communication. By maintaining clear roles and cooperative communication practices, the City Council, City Manager, and staff can effectively represent the interests of the Farmers Branch community and uphold public trust.